

February 9, 2017

Subject: Integrated Regional Conservation and Development Program –
Project Proposal to Wildlife Conservation Board

Reporting Period: December 2016 – February 2017

Staff Lead: Dennis Grossman, Strategic Growth Council

Recommended Action:

For information only – no action required.

Background:

SGC is advancing the Integrated Regional Conservation and Development (IRCAD) program, as directed by the October 2014 Council resolution. An interagency IRCAD team was established to (a) advance standards for different components of the IRCAD program, (b) evaluate the success of current and past regional conservation efforts across the State, (c) review the data and technology support required for the broad implementation of this program, and (d) refine this integrated regional planning approach through demonstration projects.

AB 2087 was passed in the 2016 legislative session. This bill promotes conservation assessments by project proponents to improve implementation efficiencies through advance mitigation credits. The bill identifies the importance of Regional Conservation Assessments (RCA) to provide the ecoregional context for the prioritization of conservation actions, which is a critical cornerstone for the IRCAD program. RCA standards are now being developed to guide the implementation of these planning efforts.

The California Wildlife Conservation Board (WCB) completed their Strategic Plan in 2014. This Plan identifies the need to follow a State Conservation Vision with a transparent and replicable scientific process to guide future WCB conservation investments. WCB has now requested a proposal from SGC to help implement their Strategic Plan by supporting the development of the State Conservation Vision through the implementation of Regional Conservation Assessments.

Update:

The SGC has submitted a project proposal to WCB that is included as a consent item on the agenda for their February 23rd Board meeting.

This project includes the following four activities:

1. Development of RCA Methods

The IRCAD Interagency Working Group has met over the past 18 months to advance Regional Conservation Assessment standards. These standards address the identification of conservation targets, development of conservation goals, determination of conservation values, and mapping these values for individual and specified target groups across an ecoregion. These methods also inform the development of

conservation strategies through the integration of opportunity factors (e.g. landscape integrity, connectivity and corridors, and ownership), threat factors (e.g. probability for development and land use change, invasive species, climate change), and the co-benefit values of conserving ecosystem services (e.g. carbon, water and agricultural lands).

2. Demonstration Projects

RCA methods will be tested through pilot applications for two ecoregions that represent different levels of data availability. The implementation of the RCA process under these different data conditions will help refine a set of standards for use across the state, advance the development of the data support technology, and define the structure and format for RCA products.

3. Technology Support

An information portal and decision support platform will be created to facilitate implementation of RCAs through the efficient access, integration, management and analysis of regional conservation and environmental data. This will be developed in partnership with CDFW to ensure the best use of their information relative to regional conservation decision-making and reporting.

4. WCB Program Support

WCB will be provided with decision support tools that use RCA generated information products to advance their mission and objectives. The decision support system will allow WCB to define conservation priorities within an ecoregion and identify general areas where these resources occur with optimal conditions for long term conservation success. Based on these criteria, this system will support a standardized WCB project evaluation process, with customized analyses and reports to rank these proposals relative to individual and composite project evaluation factors. This regional conservation information and decision support platform will also be available to help WCB project proponents develop their proposals for WCB.

This project will advance the development of Regional Conservation Assessment methodology, organize and develop data and decision support technology to implement these methods, and create practical tools for WCB to use this information for the prioritization and monitoring of conservation investments.

The RCA methodology and support technology will be refined through application in two demonstration ecoregions. The refined methodology and tools will become available to guide the future implementation of Regional Conservation Assessments across all of California's ecoregions.

The Strategic Growth Council will coordinate these activities in partnership with the CDFW, California Biodiversity Council, and conservation leadership represented in the IRCAD Interagency Working Group. The Interagency Working Group includes members from CDFW, Caltrans, DOC, CEC, UC-Davis, USFWS, TNC, CDWR and the SGC.